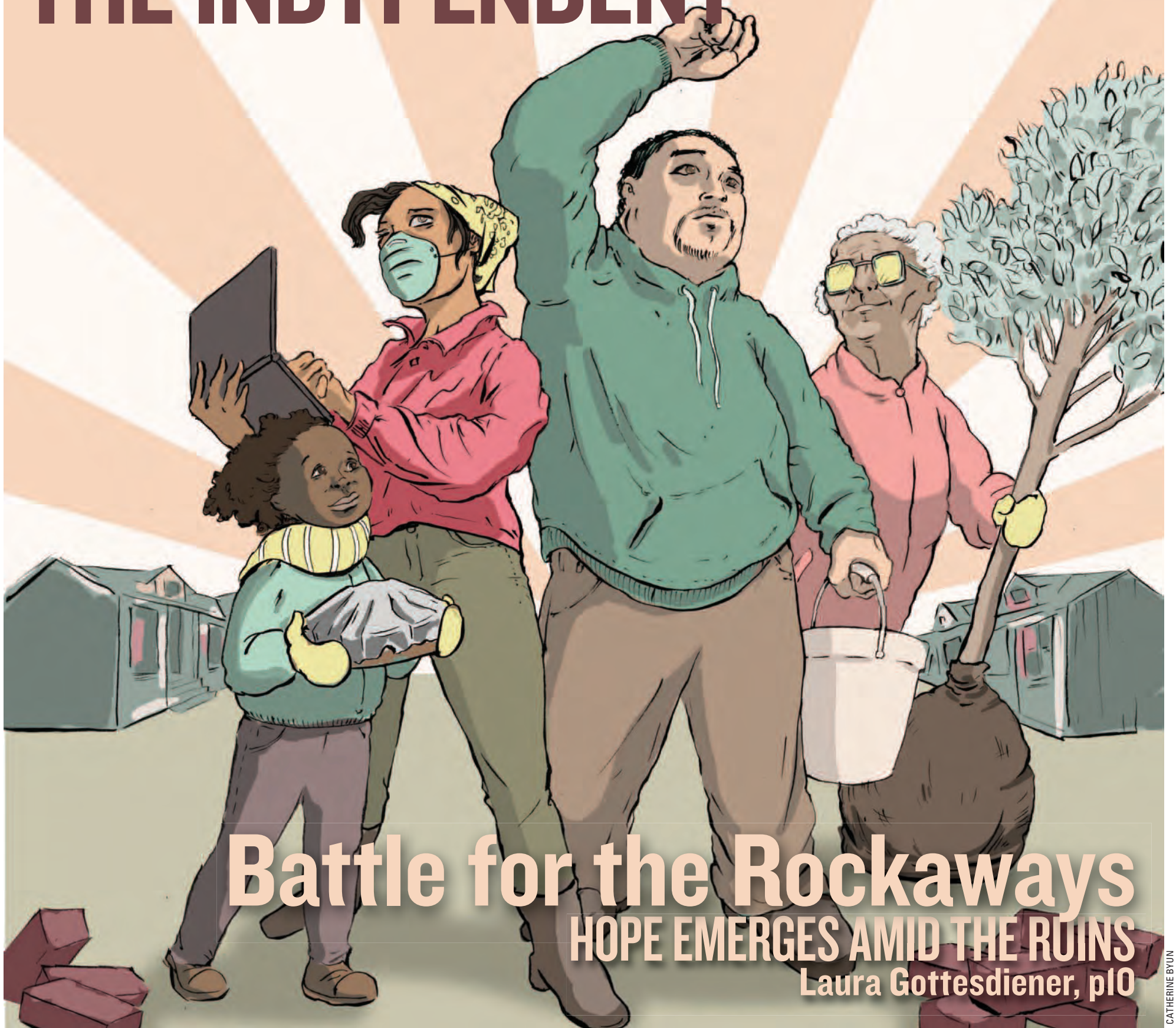


LOW-WAGE WORKERS RISING, P4 • DOHA CLIMATE CONFERENCE, P6

THE INDYPENDENT

Issue #182, December 20, 2012–January 18, 2013
A FREE PAPER FOR FREE PEOPLE



Battle for the Rockaways

HOPE EMERGES AMID THE RUINS

Laura Gottesdiener, p10

CATHERINE BYUN

KEEP THE INDY GOING STRONG IN 2013

SEE BACK PAGE>>>





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The Indypendent is a New York-based free newspaper published 13 times a year on Mondays for our print and online readership of more than 100,000. It is produced by a network of volunteers who report, write, edit, draw, design, take photos, distribute, fundraise and provide website management. Since 2000, more than 700 journalists, artists and media activists have participated in this project. Winner of more than 50 New York Community Media Alliance awards, *The Indypendent* is funded by subscriptions, reader donations, merchandise sales, benefits and advertising. We accept submissions that look at news and culture through a critical lens, exploring how systems of power — economic, political and social — affect the lives of people locally and globally. *The Indypendent* reserves the right to edit articles for length, content and clarity.

The Indypendent is affiliated with the New York City Independent Media Center, which is part of the global Indymedia movement, an international network dedicated to fostering grassroots media production, and with *IndyKids*, a children's newspaper. NYC IMC is an open publishing website (nyc.indymedia.org).

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community calendar

SUBMIT YOUR EVENTS AT INDY- EVENTS@GMAIL.COM

THU DEC 20

7pm • Sliding scale

DISCUSSION: MICRO-LENDING: IS IT PART OF THE SOLUTION...OR PART OF THE PROBLEM? This talk will challenge the idea that micro-lending is one of the key prescriptions for ending global poverty and empowering women. Viewpoints and arguments in support of micro-lending are welcome.

Revolution Books
146 W 26th St
212-691-3345 • revolutionbooksnyc.org

THU DEC 20

7:30pm • Free

REPORT BACK: SCHOOL OF AMERICAS.

The School of Americas is a U.S. Army school which trains Latin American soldiers and has been tied to human rights abuses. SOA Watch is working to close this institution through peaceful protest, grassroots action and education. Join those who participated in last month's SOA Watch for a report back and a showing of the SOA Watch-produced film *Somos Una America* (*We Are One America*). Brooklyn Society for Ethical Culture
53 Prospect Park West, Brklyn
718-768-2972 • bsec.org

FRI DEC 21

8pm • Free

EVENT: HOUSING WORKS ART SALE & EXHIBIT. Join Housing Works for an art sale featuring art that clients have created through the art therapy program. All of the proceeds will benefit Housing Works' clients, and the art will continue to be on display at Think Coffee until the end of January 2013. Think Coffee
73 Eighth Ave
347-473-7400 • housingworks.org

MON DEC 31

10pm; 2am • Free

EVENT: TIME'S UP! NEW YEAR'S EVE RIDE

& AFTER PARTY. At 10 p.m., join Time's Up! in Washington Square Park for a bike ride to Belvedere Castle in the middle of Central Park for a New Year's Eve dance party. Dress festive and bring food and drink to share.

At 2 a.m., the party will continue with DJs, dancing and more at Time's Up! space in Brooklyn.
Washington Square Park, 5th Avenue and Washington Square N
99 S 6th St, Brklyn
212-802-8222 • times-up.org

SAT JAN 5

8pm • \$18, sliding scale

PERFORMANCE: JON FROMER & REGGIE HARRIS. Join Peoples' Voice Cafe for performances by Jon Fromer, an award-winning singer/songwriter who has been at the center of social movements in the San Francisco Bay area for decades, and Reggie Harris, who spices up his folk and gospel style with elements of classical, rock, jazz and pop.

All proceeds benefit the Peoples' Voice Cafe. No one turned away due to lack of funds. Peoples Voice Cafe at The Community Church of New York Unitarian Universalist
40 E 35th St
212-787-3903 • peoplesvoicecafe.org

SAT JAN 19

3pm • \$40-\$45

EVENT: FUNDRAISER FOR FAMILIES OF POLITICAL PRISONERS. Join the Malcolm X Commemoration Committee and members of 1199 SEIU for a fundraising dinner to honor freedom fighters and their families and to work to build a movement to end political and mass imprisonment. Martin Luther King, Jr. Labor Center
1199 Union Headquarters
310 W 43rd St
718-512-5008 • mxcc519.org

SAT JAN 26

12-3pm • Sliding scale

CLASS: KID REPORTERS WRITING AND

UPCOMING EVENTS

WED, DEC 19 • 7:30pm

PANEL: RESISTING THE DEBT ECONOMY.

Debt is an integral part of our capitalist economy that keeps us increasingly dependent on oppressive power structures. At this meeting, we'll be deepening our understanding of debt and resistance. This is an opportunity for those of us who are not professional theorists to theorize in an open and supportive environment. If you are interested in presenting, email michael.g.strom@gmail.com. Sliding scale: \$6/\$10/\$15

WED, JAN 9 • 7:30pm

TALES OF THE 1% FILM SERIES: HUMAN RESOURCES.

A human morality tale that evokes paternal and filial love, and illustrates the personal risk behind political ideas. Discussion to follow. Sliding scale: \$6/\$10/\$15

THU, JAN 10 • 7:30pm

WORKSHOP: POETRY FOR SOCIAL ACTIVISTS.

If you write or are interested in writing poetry and would like to exchange thoughts with other socially-conscious poets, email email steve@stevebloompoetry.net for more information. Sliding scale: \$6/\$10/\$15

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(btwn Bank and Bethune)

Please
register online:
brechtforum.org
212-242-4201

REPORTING WORKSHOP. *IndyKids* newspaper is offering a workshop to kids ages 9-13. Kids work alongside professional journalists to research, write and edit articles about current events and social justice. Two additional workshops will be held at the same time on Feb. 2, Feb. 9 and Feb. 16. For location information and to RSVP, contact info@indykids.org. 212-592-0116 • indykids.org

**SIGN UP TO RECEIVE OUR WEEKLY
CALENDAR VIA EMAIL AT INDY-
PENDENT.ORG.**

The photo essay "Solidarity, Not Charity" on page 4 of Issue 181 was incorrectly credited to Babita Patel, instead of Elizabeth Borda. We regret this error.



On Dec. 1 *The Indypendent* hosted a community reporting workshop, where participants learned how to write and report articles for *The Indypendent* and other radical media outlets. Above, counter-clockwise: long-time *Indypendent* writer John Tarleton and Harry Katz role play in an interviewing exercise while Seamus Creighton observes. Email contact@indypendent.org for information about upcoming workshops.

WHERE DO I GET MY COPY OF THE INDYPENDENT ?

BELOW 14TH ST.

Seward Park Library
192 E. Broadway
at Jefferson St.

Bluestockings
172 Allen St.

LES People's Federal Credit Union
39 Avenue B

Whole Earth Bakery
130 St. Mark's Pl.

Theater for the New City
155 First Ave.

St. Mark's Books
31 Third Ave.

Mamoun's Falafel Restaurant
22 St. Mark's Pl.

Housing Works
126 Crosby St.

Shakespeare & Co.
716 Broadway

Hudson Park Library
66 Leroy St.

Brecht Forum
451 West St.

14TH TO 96TH ST.

Epiphany Library
228 E. 23rd St.

Muhlenberg Library
209 W. 23rd St.

Chelsea Square Restaurant
W. 23rd St. & Ninth Ave.

Columbus Library
942 Tenth Ave.

Manhattan Neighborhood
Network
537 W. 59th St.

ABOVE 96TH ST.

Bloomingdale Library
150 W. 100th St.

Book Culture
526 W. 112th St.

Harlem Library
9 W. 124th St.

George Bruce Library
518 W. 125th St.

Hamilton Grange Library
503 W. 145th St.

Uptown Sister's Books
W. 156th St. & Amsterdam

BROOKLYN

Brooklyn Museum
200 Eastern Pkwy.

Brooklyn Library
1044 Eastern Pkwy.

Long Island University
1 University Plaza

Tea Lounge
Union St. & Seventh Ave.

Verb Café
Bedford Ave. & N. 5th St.

Pacific Street Library
25 Fourth Ave.

Outpost Café
1014 Fulton St.

Kaisa's Café
146 Bedford Ave.

Bedford Library
496 Franklin Ave.

Parkside Deli
203 Parkside Ave.

QUEENS

Court Square Diner
45-30 23rd St.

Diversity Center
77-11 37th St.

CUNY Law School
2 Court Sq.

Brandworkers
45-02 23rd St., 2nd Fl.

Aubergine Cafe
49-12 Skillman Ave.

Philippine Forum
40-21 96th St.

BRONX

Brook Park
141st St. & Brook Ave.

Mott Haven Library
321 E. 140th St.

Mi Casa Bakery
18 E. Bedford Park Blvd.

STATEN ISLAND

St. George Library Center
5 Central Ave.

Port Richmond Library
75 Bennett St.

Everything Goes Book Café
208 Bay St.

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Renters in the Hands of a Corrupt Senate: LANDLORDS WIN BIG IN LATEST ALBANY POWER STRUGGLE

BY STEVEN WISHNIA

If you rent an apartment in the state of New York, the political machinations going on in the state Senate will likely ensure that your rent stays too damn high. The agreement by six Democrats to share power with the Republican minority is directly related to the real estate lobby's desire to prevent any strengthening of the state's rent laws.

Democrats won a narrow majority of the Senate in November — either 32–31 or 33–30, depending on recounts — but the deal will deny them control over who chairs committees and what bills actually get to the floor. State Sen. Jeffrey Klein, the leader of the renegade faction, the “Independent Democratic Caucus,” and Governor Andrew Cuomo, who has tacitly supported the scheme, say it's an attempt to avoid the dysfunctions of the 2009–10 session, when two Democrats pulled a similar switch and gridlocked the Senate for months.

The political dynamics are similar, however. In 2009, after Democrats won a majority of the Senate for the first time since the '60s, expanding tenant protections was a top priority. But Bronx Democrat Pedro Espada, now headed to prison for corruption, switched parties the day before his committee was scheduled to vote on a bill that would have put vacant apartments that rent for more than \$2,000 back into rent stabilization, repealing a loophole that has enabled massive and often illegal rent increases.

This time around, Klein (D-Bronx/Westchester) is the Senate Democrat closest to the real estate lobby. He worked to keep the repeal of the vacancy-deregulation law from ever coming to the Senate floor. In the 2012 election cycle, he took

more than \$165,000 from real estate interests, including the two main landlord-lobby groups [the Real Estate Board of New York (REBNY) and the Rent Stabilization Association] and Laurence Gluck/Stellar Management, an owner notorious for buying buildings in the Mitchell-Lama middle-income housing program and trying to raise rents to market rate.

“Democratic control of the Legislature

likely to support his priorities, to cut state workers' pensions and wages while refusing to raise taxes on the rich — in a state that has more billionaires than Germany, the United Kingdom, or Japan — or impose a stock-transfer tax on Wall Street.

Cuomo's politics might be described as “Bloomberg Democrat” — moderately progressive on social issues, hardline on serving and protecting the state's eco-

the Klein group.

Cuomo's list did not mention housing issues. Real estate has been the biggest contributor to his political campaigns, including more than \$3 million for his 2010 gubernatorial race, and he has refused to support more than minor measures to strengthen or enforce the state's rent controls and tenant protections.

The deal also means virtually all-white control of the state Senate. There are no black, Latino, or Asian Republican Senators, and the only nonwhite member of the Klein faction is Malcolm Smith of Queens. “Ask Governor Cuomo: Where does he stand on back-room deals putting us in the back of the bus?” state Sen. Bill Perkins of Harlem said at a rally there Dec. 8.

On the other hand, three of the “Four Amigos” who threatened to join the Republicans in 2009 were Latino. They complained that the Democratic leadership was excluding Latinos, but their real motives were more base: Three of them have since been convicted of felony corruption charges, and the fourth was trying to block same-sex marriage.

Once again, this mess illustrates the lack of democracy in New York State. The Republicans would not be close to a majority in the Senate without gross gerrymandering: Every Senate district upstate has as few people as legally permitted, and every district

in New York City has as many as possible. On housing, the most democratic solution would be for the city to set its own policies — but a 1971 law prohibits it from passing rent controls stronger than the state's. That keeps power over housing costs here in the hands of politicians who take millions of dollars from the real estate lobby, and city renters can't vote against most of them.



BETH WHITNEY

has always been the nightmare of real estate interests,” a blogger for *Crain's New York Business* wrote on Dec. 5. “REBNY in particular has carefully cultivated the independent Democrats through campaign contributions. The Senate will remain aligned with the major real estate groups.”

The deal also works for Governor Cuomo. A Republican majority will be more

likely to support his priorities, to cut state workers' pensions and wages while refusing to raise taxes on the rich — in a state that has more billionaires than Germany, the United Kingdom, or Japan — or impose a stock-transfer tax on Wall Street. The deal may also bode well for legalizing medical marijuana, as Sen. Diane Savino, its main proponent in the Senate, is one of

LOCAL NEWS BRIEFS

By Independent Staff



STOP-AND-FRISK NUMBERS DROP 30 PERCENT

The total number of stop-and-frisks by New York City police dropped by 30 percent in the first nine months of 2012 compared to the previous year, according to the New York Civil Liberties Union. The number of times the NYPD stopped and interrogated someone has fallen throughout 2012 from 203,000 stops during January to March of this year to 106,000 stops during June to September. Meanwhile, the homicide rate has dropped by 20 percent to a record low.

The decline in stop-and-frisks follows a public outcry against the program which culminated in a 25,000-person silent march on Fathers Day that passed near Mayor Michael Bloomberg's Upper

East mansion. According to the NYCLU, Blacks and Latinos continue to be the target of about 87 percent all stop-and-frisks while 90 percent of stop-and-frisks result in no charges.

PROTESTS AT KILLER COP COURT HEARING

Chanting and holding up signs that read “Justice for Ramarley” and “No warrant, no entry,” 100 supporters of Ramarley Graham turned out Dec. 11 for the latest court hearing for Richard Haste, the undercover NYPD narcotics officer accused of shooting the unarmed Bronx teenager in February. Haste followed Graham into his grandmother's apartment and shot the teen while he was allegedly trying to flush a bag of marijuana down the toilet. The shooting became a flashpoint in the campaign to reform the NYPD's stop-and-frisk policy.

MEDICAL MARIJUANA COMES TO JERSEY

New Jersey's first medical marijuana dispensary opened Dec. 6 in Montclair. According to the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 354 people with terminal or chronic illnesses are currently licensed to pur-

chase the drug. Five other nonprofits in the state have received preliminary approval to open dispensaries. New Jersey is one of 18 states to legalize medical marijuana. Medical marijuana measures have been stalled in the New York State Legislature for years due to opposition from Senate Republicans.



BLOOMBERG TAPS GOLDMAN EXEC TO LEAD SANDY RECOVERY

Mayor Bloomberg announced Dec. 6 that Marc Ricks will lead the city's post-Sandy recovery effort. Ricks is a vice president at Goldman Sachs who specializes in infrastructure investment. Goldman Sachs has been at the center of a number of Wall Street scandals in recent years, many of which have implicated the firm in ripping off its own clients. (For more Sandy recovery coverage, see Page 10.)

Low-Wage Workers Rising Up in New York City

By Peter Rugh

A line typically forms at the door of this Wendy's in Downtown Brooklyn during lunch hour. Not today. That's because a picket line circles on the Fulton Street sidewalk in front of the restaurant and organizers with New York Communities for Change (NYCC) stand by the entrance distributing leaflets, urging costumers to eat elsewhere. The previous day, on Nov. 29, employees of McDonald's, Burger King, Yum Brands and other fast food restaurants across New York City walked off the job in the largest fast food workers' strike in American history. Their demands: \$15 an hour and union recognition. But after walking off the job last Thursday, the workers faced another challenge the following day — walking back on.

Upon returning to work at Wendy's on Nov. 30, single mother Shalonda Montgomery was told not to bother clocking in. "She was the youngest worker," said Sherry Jones of NYCC, "and she was the newest. They let everybody else go right back. But they tried to make an example out of her." When news of the firing got out, fast food workers from across the city mobilized in Montgomery's defense. The restaurant quickly became the focal point of the Fast Food Forward Campaign, which the day before had helped orchestrate the strike that saw approximately 200 workers at 27 restaurants across the city refuse to go on the job.

The fast food fight back is part of a growing upsurge in a struggle initiated by the working poor in the United States. Last month, a nationwide day of action involving laborers at hundreds of Walmarts on Black Friday left a ray of hope on the consumerist holiday for workers and their supporters. In addition to the fast food fight at the end of November, there have recently been a number of successful unionization drives among car wash and grocery workers in New York City.

"Workers have been talking with one another," said Deborah Axt of the community-based labor organization Make the Road. "There's an unprecedented level of organizing going on."

Make the Road has helped spearhead a campaign among car wash workers in which strikers have won higher wages and back pay. Four car washes have voted to unionize since the organizing drive began in March. Axt said Make the Road identified workers ready to lead the car wash crusade while campaigning in immigrant and working-class communities around healthcare and housing issues. The organization put the workers in touch with one another, and today worker councils exist at numerous car washes, coordinating through a citywide steering committee.

Their efforts have been bolstered by an agreement from the Taxi Workers Alliance and the city's livery drivers (represented by the International Association of Machinists) not to patronize targeted shops, though Axt admits there are really no "good-guy" car washes. The going hourly wage is \$5.50 in the car wash industry — the tipped minimum wage — and shifts often last up to 12



RESTAURANT RUMBLE: Striking fast food workers and their supporters march through Times Square on Nov. 29.

hours. Yet there are some notably exploitative car washes, such as the 23 owned by car wash kingpin John Lage, who is under investigation by the state attorney general's office over hourly wage violations. Three of Lage's car washes have voted to join the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union, but so far Lage has been unwilling to sit down and discuss terms and conditions. Make the Road is pushing for the city government to follow the lead set by taxi and livery car drivers and cancel existing contracts with Lage.

Juan Carlos, an employee at a Lage car wash in SoHo, said that once he began organizing for a union Lage approached him personally and gave him a 50-cent raise. In the seven years prior to the union drive, whenever Carlos complained about his pay he was told that if he didn't like it he could go home — and now, all of a sudden, a raise.

"It was his way of saying, 'Stop organizing,'" said Carlos. But Carlos didn't stop organizing, and as we spoke at a picket line on Nov. 29, roughly 300 "car washeros" and supporters stamped to the rhythm of a brass band in front of the SoHo car wash, demanding that Lage negotiate a fair contract with the newly formed union.

"I'm not fighting just for myself," he said. "I'm fighting for all of us. We're only going to win this by fighting together."

It was in this spirit of fighting together that approximately 2,000 workers from across the city rallied in Times Square on Dec. 6. Many were from established unions, there in support of their low-wage comrades battling for collective bargaining powers.

Speakers called for ending the Bush-era tax cuts for the wealthy and comprehensive immigration reform. Among those on the podium was City Council Speaker Christine Quinn, who praised the city's fast food workers.

"They stood up in an industry that has historically never been organized," she said. "They've stood up and said that they have rights. They've faced the threat of being fired. They're going to stand together and all of us are going to have their backs." Quinn declined to comment later when asked about her opposition to legislation that would grant workers sick pay.

ORGANIZING GROCERY STORES

Beyond the podiums and speaker systems of the large labor rallies, many small struggles are quietly brewing across the city. In front of the Golden Farm market in Kensington, Brooklyn, on a recent evening, a handful of people stood outside urging customers not to do business with the grocer. Like the car washeros, Golden Farm workers voted to unionize, but their boss has yet to sit down at the bargaining table.

"We're asking customers in the community to boycott the store until the owner decides to sign a contract that will guarantee the workers basic benefits," said Lucas Sanchez of NYCC. The National Labor Relations Board certified the election results this September, and the law now compels the store's owner, Sonny Kim, to negotiate in good faith. But, according to Sanchez, Kim has been stalling in hopes of discouraging workers and pressuring them into quitting.

NYCC has helped organize a daily picket of the store and has been leafleting out front, not only to cut a hole in Kim's wallet but also as a way of garnering support so that the workers in the store know they are not alone.

Aside from union certification, the fight at Golden Farm has paid off in other ways. Through a lawsuit, the workers were able to reach a settlement with Kim for back pay for the years they worked for below minimum wage. Many of the laborers at Golden Farm had been employed by Kim for five to ten years, making \$4.90 an hour. "Thirteen workers in this store have had the courage not only to stand up to the owner, but also to put their names down on a lawsuit, to organize a union election and to continue, even though it's been a long process and the owner has done just about everything to get them to leave voluntarily," said Sanchez.

As part of its ongoing low-wage worker campaigns, NYCC has been approaching laborers at supermarkets, fast food joints and car washes across the city, finding out what conditions on the job are like and building relationships. They were referred to Golden Farm by workers at another nearby grocer who had won a contract and settlement.

"They told us, 'Hey, you should check out that store on Church and East 4th,'" remembers Sanchez. "Workers there want to fight back." NYCC got in touch with employees at Golden Farm and they began meeting regularly at a nearby Burger King after hours. But some workers had their doubts. "What I think pushed them over the top," Sanchez says, "was when two guys from that other

grocery store came and talked to them and said, ‘Listen, we were able to do the same thing. We kept our jobs and were successful.’ I think that’s definitely what motivated them.”

STANDING TOGETHER

At the Wendy’s on Fulton Street, the cross-pollination of working-class consciousness that has helped to push the Golden Farm and car wash struggles forward was alive and well. By noon the restaurant was shut down by a swarm of fast food workers and their supporters, who briefly occupied the restaurant, chanting, “I know! I saw! What you did was against the law!” The crowd then moved outside and hit the pavement while City Councilmember Jumaane Williams and NYCC representatives negotiated with management.

Marquis Montgomery (no relation to Shalonda) was also on hand. He didn’t have the kind of support that Shalonda received when the ax fell on him. Marquis was working at the same Wendy’s and spreading the word about the Fast Food Forward campaign among his coworkers when he says he was unjustly fired.

Things would have been different, Marquis says, if he’d been in a union. “I had no rights, so nothing could protect me. If I’d been in a union I would have had a chance to defend myself.” After he was let go, NYCC gave him a job organizing the strike at the very restaurant that had handed him his termination papers. Marquis helped orchestrate a walkout of the entire store on Nov. 29, something he’s proud of since he knows what it is like inside.

“I worked 33 hours a week. That’s a lot of

hours. And I have a child. I have to go home and be a father,” Marquis said. “When I’d come home with my check I’d have exactly \$210. Maybe you can pay your water bill with that and then you buy your Metrocard and you’re broke.”

Marquis said the strike was “just the first punch in the fight,” adding that executives with several of the franchises where employees walked off have agreed to begin a dialogue with workers seeking union representation. But if they don’t want to be reasonable, he warns, “we’ll have to go on strike again. We won’t stop until the fight is done.”

In just under an hour, Councilmember Williams emerged from the restaurant with some good news for the picketers. “Thanks to you guys,” said Williams, “Shalonda Montgomery is now working inside.”

Local deli worker Israel Miro, who joined in solidarity with the protesters on his lunch break, was elated by the news. “We’re busting our asses and these corporations are making billions of dollars,” Miro said, shooting the freckle-faced, redheaded mascot on Wendy’s storefront the evil eye. “But when we stood together today, the lady got her job back. We accomplished something. It’s so beautiful to see that when New Yorkers are in the midst of a recession we can stand together. All over the country, all over the world, this could happen.”

Peter Rugh is a facilitator for Occupy Wall Street Environmental Solidarity and he blogs at EartoEarth.org.

A version of this article was originally published on Wagingnonviolence.org.

The Fast Food Industry by the Numbers By Karen Okamoto

Current worth of the fast food industry:	\$200 billion
Percentage that McDonald’s profits increased over the last four years:	130 percent
McDonald’s reported profits in 2011:	\$5.5 billion
Number of fast food workers in New York City:	50,000
Number of fast food workers that participated in strike:	200
Median annual wages for fast food workers in New York City:	\$18,500
Amount of money donated to Mitt Romney’s 2012 presidential campaign by the food and beverage industry:	\$1,867,995
Amount of money donated to President Barack Obama’s 2012 campaign by the food and beverage industry:	\$880,618
Number of McDonald’s franchises in the United States:	14,098
Number of Burger King franchises in the United States:	12,300

SOURCES: dailykos.com, yahoo.com, ibtimes.com, marknewell.com, aboutmcdonalds.com, investor.kk.com, qponsecrets.org, motherjones.com, nytimes.com,



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Inside the Doha Climate Talks

BY RENÉE FELTZ

DOHA, Qatar — Less than a month after Hurricane Sandy hit the East Coast, I arrived in one of the Middle East's wealthiest enclaves to cover the United Nations' 18th annual climate conference.

Doha reminded me of an American suburb with its SUV-clogged traffic jams, trophy homes and sterile shopping malls that had sprouted up in the past 40 years thanks to the oil and natural gas wealth that has flowed into this petro-monarchy, making it the highest per capita carbon emitter in the world. The pudgy face of Sheik Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, emire of Qatar, is plastered on everything and protest is largely forbidden. A Qatari poet critical of the regime was sentenced to life in prison just before the conference began, though hundreds did gather for a march calling on Arab countries to take the lead in the climate talks.

The U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change's annual Conference of the Parties (COP) is meant to provide a forum for nearly 200 countries to establish a successor agreement to the 1997 Kyoto Protocol, the international treaty that set binding obligations on industrialized nations to reduce their carbon emissions. The United States has flouted Kyoto from the beginning and I was skeptical that this would change. Still, it seemed plausible that second-term Obama — after referencing the “destructive power of a warming planet” in his re-election night acceptance speech — might seriously commit to reducing greenhouse gas emissions, starting with a productive role for the United States at COP18.

YOUTH IN ACTION

Skipping bureaucratic plenaries, I began most of my mornings with a visit to the youth spokescouncil. Participants included Amanda Nesheiwat, a 23-year-old climate change activist from Secaucus, New Jersey, as well as a delegation of college students from Taiwan (one of many island nations

Nesheiwat said.

As the prospects for a strong deal dimmed, some countries began to respond. Naderev “Yeb” Saño, part of the Philippines Climate Change Commission, tweeted, “The youth will be the difference here in Doha. We're near the end of the first week. History in the making.” Then Typhoon Bopha — a cate-

what is demanded of earth's seven billion people. I appeal to all: Please, no more delays, no more excuses. Please, let Doha be remembered as the place where we found the political will to turn things around, and let 2012 be remembered as the year the world found the courage to do so, to find the courage to take responsibility for the future we

want. I ask of all of us here, if not us, then who? If not now, then when? If not here, then where?”

UP IN SMOKE

Ultimately, COP 18 failed to deliver any reduction in carbon emissions that are warming the planet and in turn causing the extreme weather that is becoming the new normal. “The truth is that there is nothing in this deal which can keep emissions from going up as opposed to down,” is how Samantha Smith of the World Wildlife Fund summed it up.

Yes, the Kyoto Protocol was extended another 8 years for the 191 member countries who account for 15 percent of the world's emissions. But no new emission cuts were agreed to by the largest polluters: the United States and China. A new accord called the Durban Platform that would set emissions goals for all nations remains vaguely outlined, with industrialized nations pushing for voluntary targets. Betraying a lack

of urgency, the agreement won't take effect until 2020.

“The coal industry won here, the oil industry won here,” said Alden Meyer of the Union of Concerned Scientists, reacting to the failure of the Doha talks. “This wasn't an environmental or science-driven discussion. This was a trade fair.”



A VOICE FOR THE PLANET: Arab youth lead the first-ever climate demonstration in a Gulf State on Dec. 1. The rally took place in Doha, Qatar during United Nations-sponsored negotiations on a new global treaty to reduce carbon emissions.

represented), and several women wearing hijabs, which emphasized the earnest look in their eyes. Each day the youth fanned out to engage with thousands of conference delegates about their future.

“I don't want to wait until another disaster for more people to realize that our choices shape the future children will inherit,”

gory 5 storm — struck the Philippines with 161 mile per hour winds, landing unusually close to the equator. Amidst a growing storm toll — more than 900 dead, tens of thousands homeless — Saño made a tearful, impatient plea for his colleagues to do more.

“The outcome of our work is not about what our political masters want. It is about

CARBON BILLIONAIRES

To truly address climate change head-on, the United States would have to agree to a treaty that requires profound changes to the coal, oil and shale gas industry, as well as its transportation and manufacturing sectors. This seems about as likely as the government taking over ExxonMobil, thanks in no small part to the influence of the billionaire brothers Charles and David Koch.

“As the top spenders to stop climate policy in the planet's most polluting nation...the two oil barons from Wichita hold hostage any progress in Washington and hence any meaningful global deal,” said Victor Menotti, executive director of the International Forum on Globalization. He co-authored a new report unveiled in Doha, titled “U.S. Carbon Billionaires and the U.N. Climate Deadlock.”

Menotti tracked how Koch money is funneled through lobbyists and think tanks to thwart environmental regulation of the fossil fuel industry and deter subsidies for renewable energy solutions.

“The disparate influence of large corporations and wealthy individuals in contrast to the sway of the bottom 90 percent of Americans needs to be addressed,” he concluded, “for meaningful change in environmental policy to materialize.”

This is the same conclusion drawn by activists trying to stop the expansion of the Keystone XL pipeline, which would carry toxic tar sand slurry from Alberta, Canada, to be processed into crude oil by U.S. refineries along the Gulf Coast. Koch Industries has a massive stake in seeing the project move forward. Its subsidiary, Flint Hills Resources, already operates a refinery in Minnesota that handles about 25 percent of tar sands imports to the United States.

Ramsey Sprague, a spokesperson for the Texas Tar Sands Blockade, joined in via online videostream to a press conference Menotti held at COP-18. After describing how activists had locked down 25-feet inside a section of pipe as an act of civil disobedience, he was asked what he steps he wished the Koch brothers would take.

“We don't want billionaires,” Sprague replied. “the problem of extreme concentration of wealth and power is what undermines democracy. There is too much power in too few hands.” He argued that even the negotiators at the COP do not directly report to billionaires, “they are unauthorized to strike deals here to save the planet because of that extreme concentration of power.”

— Renée Feltz



AT THE CRIME SCENE: Young activists with the “Adopt a Negotiator Project” discuss plans for monitoring the work of negotiators from each of their home countries.

That is because the talks assume the establishment of a global carbon credit market, as outlined in the Kyoto Protocol, as a way for polluting countries to offset their emissions by purchasing credits from those with some to spare, or from projects that generate carbon offsets, such as a wind farm. This market is currently unregulated, and in some cases, corrupted. About the only impact such schemes have had so far is to divert financing for making the transition away from fossil fuel dependence, thus locking in future emission increases.

The failure of the Doha talks signal how the United States and other powerful nations put their own economic interests — which are deeply intertwined with the existing fossil fuel driven economy — ahead of any desire to keep the planet from becoming uninhabitable. The only solutions that capitalism can entertain to the climate crisis are ones that allow for the ever-greater accumulation of profits.

As Claudia Salerno, the top climate negotiator for Venezuela puts it: “The first thing that countries need to understand when they want to succeed in this process is to understand that this is not an environmental process.” Salerno told *Democracy Now!* that developed countries “want to create mechanisms that will allow them to buy the right to pollute to a certain level and then to exchange, among them, their rights to contaminate the land.”

Meanwhile, the COP still lacks an agreed-upon mechanism to finance clean energy in developing countries, or even to fund poor nations already adapting to damage incurred by climate change. Much of the \$100

billion industrialized nations pledged at the 2009 COP-15 in Copenhagen was actually re-purposed aid countries had already promised before. Still, various estimates put the total disbursed in the last few years at about \$30 billion. This comes as New York and New Jersey requested about \$60 billion in federal aid just to recover from Hurricane Sandy.

The significance of delaying structural change is overwhelming. Even if just the fossil fuel industry’s current reserves were burned, this would cause the carbon dioxide levels in the atmosphere to soar to 500 parts per million. This is well

beyond the current level of 391 ppm and would move us far away from the goal of reducing carbon dioxide levels to 350 ppm, which is what scientists say we have to hit to avoid likely runaway global warming. “The United States and President Obama have to answer this question very clearly: What does he want his legacy to be? Does he want his legacy to be that the United States was a country that had a huge historical responsibility and that actually stepped up to lead the rest of the world?” asked Kumi Naidoo, executive director of Greenpeace International, as the conference drew to a close. “Or are they going to send a message that U.S. democracy is [the] best democracy money can buy and the money that buys the democracy is in fact oil, coal and gas. That is what is at stake here.”

Renée Feltz is a producer at Democracy Now!



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Aftermath of Gaza Assault

BLACK EYE FOR ISRAEL

AND A STRENGTHENED HAMAS

BY ALEX KANE

There should be no doubt that Israel achieved the narrow military objectives it set for its army when it commenced “Operation Pillar of Cloud,” its latest assault on Gaza in mid-November. The operation began with the assassination of Hamas commander Ahmed al-Jabari on Nov. 14 and ended with a ceasefire agreement Nov. 21.

When the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) announced its assault, its stated goal was protecting Israeli civilians by crippling the “terrorist infrastructure” of armed Palestinian groups like Hamas and the Islamic Jihad. Specifically, the Israeli air force combed the densely populated Gaza Strip for rocket launch sites and top-level militants firing projectiles into Israel. A week into the operation, the IDF claimed to have hit 1,500 targets.

It’s clear that one of the most powerful militaries in the world, armed with high-tech U.S. weaponry ranging from F16 jets to Apache helicopters, struck most of its targets. And when the ceasefire agreement was reached, Israeli leaders sounded triumphant. “We hit their senior commanders, we destroyed thousands of rockets which were aimed towards the south and most of those aimed towards central Israel, and we crushed Hamas’ control facilities,” said Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in a statement announcing the ceasefire.

But Israel will come out of this assault the loser, no matter how many targets it hit. It’s a reminder that the Israel-Palestine conflict will not be won militarily; the only lasting solution will be political.

Israel’s image is tarnished by the high civilian death toll; the country’s weakened regional position has been exposed; and Hamas will survive another day, boosted by having resisted the might of the Israeli military, despite dissent against its authoritarian rule. This Pyrrhic victory is a replay of Israel’s deadly assault on Gaza in 2008–09, dubbed “Operation Cast Lead.”

“Netanyahu perhaps gained domestically by demonstrating that he’s willing to go to war very aggressively,” said human rights attorney and activist Noura Erakat in a phone interview, but “Israel, on the whole, has lost a lot. And I can only say this by looking at how the media has responded.... During Operation Cast Lead there was some sort of sympathy that Israel had to do something about the rocket fire. It falls on deaf ears when Israel does it again four years later. And when it becomes evident to many that Israel’s strategy is to pummel Palestinian society every four years and not achieve long-term solutions, then...I think Israel has lost on this level.”

Even on a strictly military level, Israel’s massive assault on Hamas — an easy feat considering the vast power disparity between the two sides — will not radically change the status quo that has existed since the Islamist movement won control of Gaza in 2007. After the 22-day operation in 2008–09, Israel claimed victory, but a year later, Israel was telling U.S. officials it was



MOURNING: Palestinian women react to the death of Mahmoud Raed Saddllah, a four-year-old child who was killed by an Israeli airstrike in Gaza. Thirty-three children were killed during the Israeli onslaught in November.

worried that Hamas was re-arming.

“In Israel, they talk of ‘mowing the lawn’ in Gaza, a callous idiom used to refer to the periodic bombardment of a besieged territory in the hopes of reducing the capacity of militant groups every few years,” Yousef Munayyer of the Palestine Center pointed out in the *New Yorker*. “Each time they ‘mow,’ however, they sow seeds of hatred for the next generation. How successful, morally or militarily, is a war whose repetition is planned?”

Beyond the military question is Israel’s international reputation coming out of this assault. The Israeli government’s strenuous efforts to brand the country as liberal and democratic, already undermined by the continued occupation and human rights abuses, will be set back further by the death toll in Gaza. In eight days of pounding Gaza, an estimated 156 Palestinians died — including 103 civilians, according to the Palestinian Center for Human Rights. Thirty-three children and 13 women were killed and almost 1,000 were injured, virtually all civilians.

Perhaps the most striking case is the killing of the al-Dalou family. Twelve members of the same family were wiped out by an Israeli air strike that the military says was meant for the head of Hamas’ rocket-launching unit. As *Haaretz* reporter Avi Issacharoff noted, “Just as the pictures showing the results of the Israeli bombing of Kafr Qana in July 2006 changed the face of the Second Lebanon War and turned world public opinion against the Israeli operation, in the same way the bombardment of the house in Gaza and the killing of all 12 of its residents is liable to elicit Arab, European and, above all, American pressure on Israel to stop the aerial attacks immediately.”

The United States has blocked efforts to hold Israel accountable for war crimes.

Last month’s assault was also the first major test of how the Arab uprisings have changed Israel’s position in the region. While the Israeli nightmare of an “Islamist winter” with dire consequences for the state seems

overblown, countries in the new Middle East did flex their muscles, albeit for their own interests. Egypt and Tunisia, longtime U.S. allies in the midst of a revolutionary process that has brought to power Islamists who are more sympathetic to Hamas, sent high-level delegations to Gaza to express solidarity. Turkey’s prime minister, still angry over Israel’s 2010 killing of nine Turks on board a Gaza aid flotilla, called Israel a “terrorist state.”

These were powerful symbols of a new Middle East, though the rhetoric never turned into drastic action. Egypt has been navigating carefully between Israel and the United States on one side and Hamas on the other. Compounding Egypt’s predicament was its desire for regional stability to help repair its reeling economy. But Egypt did garner renewed prestige by using its contacts with Hamas to help broker the ceasefire agreement and acting as the guarantor.

Finally, there’s the fact that Hamas, while militarily weakened, emerged from Israel’s assault strengthened politically. They were sought out by Arab leaders during the assault. And the ceasefire agreement signed between Hamas and Israel states that the crippling economic closure of Gaza will be loosened and that Israeli assassinations of Hamas leaders would cease, though it remains to be seen whether the blockade is permanently eased.

Although Israel continues to use Hamas’ rule in Gaza as evidence that it has “no partner for peace,” in the long run, Hamas will reap the dividends of its rational and nimble position post-Arab Spring. Hamas’ leadership has thrown in its lot with the revolutionary wave sweeping the Arab world, abandoning Syria as its main patron.

And Palestinians in the West Bank are now looking to Hamas with a new eye. Hamas demonstrates an ever stronger contrast with Mahmoud Abbas, the head of Fatah and the Palestinian Authority. Abbas,

Continued on page 16

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BATTLE FOR THE ROCKAWAYS

ANOTHER VISION OF RECONSTRUCTION TAKES ROOT

By Laura Gottesdiener

On the bumper-to-bumper commute to the Upper East Side on Dec. 4, Luis Casco wanted to know one thing: Couldn't he just talk how he would back at his church in Far Rockaway?

"You know, like 'Hi, my name is Luis, and I'm here to tell you about what's going on in my community?'" he asked. All the technical phrases and activist jargon was intimidating the 22-year-old, whose entire organizing career fit into the span of approximately five weeks, beginning a few nights after the Atlantic Ocean met Jamaica Bay and stretching up until that very moment, when he was on his way to a press conference at Mayor Bloomberg's apartment to remind Manhattan that at least one area of the five boroughs still resembled a war zone.

The rest of the car agreed, and when Casco stepped up to the front of the press conference an hour later, he did exactly that, declaring in his low voice: "We have a mold problem. There's two-year-old babies in these homes, people with asthma getting sicker. I lost my home. I don't have a home. We need emergency housing now.... How would you feel, Mayor Bloomberg, living in these homes?"

Casco spoke with confidence, but, as the snapping cameras of the Associated Press and the *New York Times* photographers demonstrated, he wasn't back at his church in his working-class, mostly Hispanic neighborhood in Far Rockaway. Instead, he was standing closer to the stage of global power than he'd been in his life — and the event that had catapulted him to this position was, curiously, the tragedy of Hurricane Sandy.

MAKE-BELIEVE

Almost two months after the hurricane slammed into New York City, Casco's neighborhood in Far Rockaway is in a curious state of make-believe. In the minds of those stationed in City Hall, life on the farthest outskirts of Queens, a peninsula that was home to 115,000 people before the storm, has once again become functional. Tolls have been reinstated; city school buses are running; street parking laws — and the inevitable accompanying tickets — are back in effect; rent is due.

Yet, underneath this veneer of forced, revenue-generating normalcy, the eastern area of the peninsula, where Casco and other working-class, mostly people of color live,

is decidedly not back to normal. According to Queens State Senator Joe Addabbo, there are still 10,000 homes without electricity and heat in the Rockaways, and — according to reports by numerous on-the-ground organizers — the majority of those houses are in the poorer neighborhoods of Far Rockaway.

The island's only hospital is packed to capacity, schools are shuttered indefinitely, and on block after block families are living in mold-infested houses. Other toxins are more subtle but no less damaging for the Rockaways: the eviction and rent-hike notices (letters whose delivery is delayed because post offices are still closed) and the increasingly common sight of suited speculators canvassing neighborhoods offering a quick, easy (and predatory) buy-out.

These persistent problems exist in all of the hard-hit areas of the outer boroughs, from Coney Island to Red Hook to the southern coast of Staten Island. Yet, perhaps nowhere are these current and future threats more intense than in the brightly-painted bungalows and tall public housing towers of Far Rockaway, where every force — from the churning Atlantic to the city's mighty real estate industry — threatens destruction. In the face of these dangers, however, community leaders like Casco and grassroots organizers are working toward a very different vision: a post-Sandy reconstruction that builds a more equitable and sustainable New York City. And the surprising part? So far, they're winning.

PAT CARTER

Pat Carter, a nearby neighbor of Casco and a Far Rockaway resident since 1982, began a food and clothing distribution center on the front porch of her neighbor's turquoise-painted bungalow on Beach 24th Street immediately after the storm hit. Her story is like hundreds of others from across the affected areas: She began handing out canned food, then blankets, then clothes, expanding her operation to an adjoining bungalow porch, then a third. Sturdy winter boots arrived, then a solar-powered generator hauled on a tractor-trailer with California plates. Residents flooded by the hundreds to receive goods — and lend a hand.

Now that the need for these immediate items has died down, Carter is making bigger plans. In collaboration with organizers from Occupy Sandy, a recovery network that includes many participants from Oc-

cupy Wall Street, she's launching a new community group to keep the recovery momentum going.

"We need to organize the community from here [24th Street] all the way to 32nd Street," she said. "A lot of people have come together to work on disaster work, and we don't want to move. Now we need to do something to keep the community together."

An upbeat, almost jolly retired New York Police Department detective, Carter rattled off a list of initiatives, many already underway: programs for the teenagers to reduce gang activity. A pre-existing plan to convert the freeway underpass into a pedestrian and bicycle-only zone that now looks feasible. A push to include some of the bungalows to the National Registry of Historic Buildings in order to avoid mass bulldozing. Even an ambitious proposal to find financing to install solar panels up and down these blocks and turn these tiny houses into a national model for alternative energy use.

"A lot of stuff should be able to happen now," she said. As she unrolled her grand plans, at least a half-dozen passing neighbors, teenagers and adults alike, called out, "Hey Pat!"

"They're my volunteers," she explained.

Weather-related disasters are powerful opportunities to radically reshape landscapes — both physical and political. Areas like the bungalows in Far Rockaway are prime locations for disaster capitalism, especially since New York City's coasts have long ceased to be a "catch basin for the poor" (as one *New York Times* essay described the areas), and are now the primary target of expensive redevelopment. Over the last few decades, the city's land-use policy has been to promote as much luxury building along the city's waterfront as possible, from Brooklyn Bridge "Park" to Willets Point in Queens to the public-private partnership Hudson Yards, the largest private development project in the nation, which broke ground two blocks from Manhattan's West Side highway a month after the storm. (The highway and adjacent areas flooded substantially during the hurricane.)

Yet, elites and transnational corporations — the 1 percent, in Occupy speech — aren't the only ones who can take control of a crisis. Because social justice groups were some of the first responders on the ground, beating out federal agencies like FEMA in immediate relief, the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy is shaping up to be a two-sided con-



GETTING ORGANIZED: Pat Carter of Far Rockaway started a food and clothing distribution center on her neighbor's front porch. Now she is mobilizing her neighborhood to fight for its long-term needs.



MUTUAL AID: Volunteers distribute relief supplies in Far Rockaway.

test between those who would capitalize on the crisis in order to privatize and those who are envisioning a progressive reconstruction, one that would not only replace the washed-away resources but also meet the neighborhood's perpetual needs.

HEALTHCARE FOR ALL

"This is a perfect time to be talking about universal healthcare and access to clinics," said Mary Caliendo. A reverend who worked in the geriatrics department of Cornell Medical College, Caliendo has now been organizing alongside volunteer doctors and healthcare professionals in the Rockaways for weeks. This network already established the YANA health clinic on the western side of the island — which spurred the city to create two mobile clinics of its own.

Caliendo begins to list her top health concerns: hypothermia, mold, respiratory distress, tetanus. And then, of course, the mental illnesses: depression, growing agoraphobia (fear of leaving the house), people already diagnosed as bipolar, schizophrenic, or recovering addicts going weeks without their medication. Official reports say that so far at least eight Rockaway residents have died since the storm hit, some from post-storm injuries like falling down darkened stairwells or bleeding to death from cuts.

"If we had a single-player plan, we wouldn't be having a health crisis right now," Caliendo said.

Instead of waiting for legislative change, however, Caliendo and others are making the change happen on the ground, creating free clinics and peer mental health counseling groups on the eastern side of the peninsula.

Within a week of the storm hitting, housing organizers from around the country began discussing the potential to create community land trusts — structures that allow a community group, rather than an individual, to hold the title to homes or land — in devastated areas. Meanwhile, as the threat of mass dis-

placement sets in, some have begun speaking about using anti-eviction tactics and vacant home or land takeovers, especially of city-owned property.

"Eviction defense will be a key way to defend the best interests of the people," said Diego Ibanez, a community organizer who has been working in the Rockaways since the day after the storm hit and is now part of a campaign to stop eviction and demolition.

Although New York is a real estate city, there have been dozens of successful housing and land struggles to prevent displacement in the past — including fights in this very area of Far Rockaway to prevent stretches of bungalows and public housing towers from being demolished.

"And it was stopped. The bungalows are still there, and the public housing is

still there," explained Tom Angotti, a professor of urban affairs and planning at Hunter College, and the author of *New York for Sale: Community Planning Confronts Global Real Estate*.

"In the broad scope of things it may not seem like a lot, but these things reverberate," he continued. "But I'm certain that it gives some of the real estate people pause before they start to meddle in territory where they know they're going to find opposition."

Meanwhile, for a community that rarely

Continued on page 16



FIVE THAT ARE MAKING A DIFFERENCE

By Independent Staff

Along with Occupy Sandy, a number of community-based organizations with deep local roots played key roles in the initial relief efforts. As the focus turns to rebuilding, groups like these five will be at the center of struggles for a fair and equitable recovery.

RED HOOK INITIATIVE

Over the past decade, Red Hook Initiative has developed a number of youth empowerment initiatives from middle school students to young adults. In the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy, RHI became a central relief hub for the community and a lifeline for hundreds of seniors and disabled people stranded in nearby high-rise apartment buildings deprived of heat and water. Going forward, RHI is focusing its recovery efforts on providing comprehensive social services, economic recovery through job training and development and planning recovery and prevention efforts with other allied groups.

For more, see rhicenter.org.

CAAAV ORGANIZING ASIAN COMMUNITIES

While Wall Street was back to business within a few days, CAAAV was at the center of providing relief to Chinatown residents stranded by the storm and the power outages that followed. Now, it is working to make sure that residents and small businesses in this primarily working class neighborhood receive the disaster relief assistance and insurance payouts they are entitled to and avoid a repeat of the aftermath of 9/11 in which aid poured into more upscale Lower Manhattan neighborhoods while Chinatown was largely ignored.

For more, see caavv.org

EL CENTRO DEL INMIGRANTE

Staten Island's Latino immigrant population has grown steadily in recent years and the Port Richmond-based El Centro has grown with it providing a range of services including English language night courses and defending workers against unscrupulous employers. Since Hurricane Sandy hit, El Centro members have fanned out to hard-hit areas of the island to help gut homes and construct drywall for free.

For more, see elcentronyc.org

GOOD OLD LOWER EAST SIDE (GOLES)

A neighborhood housing and preservation organization, GOLES has helped to lead the fight against gentrification of the Lower East Side for many years. After the storm, it channeled emergency supplies to hard-hit neighborhood residents many of whom were elderly or disabled people living in the NYCHA houses along the East River. GOLES is currently surveying residents and small business about their post-Sandy needs while assisting people whose heat and power still hasn't been restored. It is also working to prevent landlords from passing on the cost of repairs to boilers and other infrastructure in the form of illegal rent increases.

For more, see goles.org.

PICTURE THE HOMELESS

For the past few years Picture the Homeless has released annual reports on the number of vacant buildings and empty lots in the that could be converted to affordable housing. Now, the group is demanding seat at the table during recovery talks after Hurricane Sandy displaced an estimated 40,000 New Yorkers which comes in addition to the 47,000 people who were living in the city's shelter system before the storm. While Mayor Michael Bloomberg claims there is little affordable housing available for storm victims, PTH's has latest real estate census shows empty buildings in the city could house 72,000 people and empty lots could be developed to house another 128,000 people.

For more, see picturethehomeless.org.

Time to Go on the Offensive

BY YOTAM MAROM

The best defense is a good offense.

It's been almost two months since Hurricane Sandy. Windows of opportunity that have opened will soon close again, and we need to seize the moment. There are now fewer volunteers, fewer people reading the mass emails from Occupy Sandy, fewer hubs in active service. And the vultures are still circling, hoping to use this period of crisis to replace flooded bungalows and moldy housing projects with the fancy condos and luxury hotels they've always wanted.

We're usually inclined to fight power when it is being carried out, but that's often too late to stop it. Similarly, we're inclined to fight power where it is most felt — in our communities, in the poor neighborhoods and communities of color around the city, in the ghettos that separate the many from the few who profit from their exploitation. That, too, is a mistake, because the powerful make decisions far, far away from there.

There's still a bit of time and a ton of potential to make the shift from relief to resistance. If we want to really have a say and change the rules of the game, we have to take the fight from where power is felt to the heart of the beast where it originates — from the Coney Island projects, the bungalows on Rockaway Beach and the blue-collar neighborhoods in Staten Island to Wall Street and City Hall.

ALL IN THE TIMING

The city government is already thinking about how it is going to spend the enormous sums of federal money that will be poured into redevelopment in the near future. The Wall Street investors in unpublicized meetings are confident they will get a big piece of the pie. The disaster-capitalist developers are already out there doing everything they can to ensure that they get the contracts.

By the time the bulldozers come to knock down the bungalows in the Rockaways, and the contractors come to build condos in their place, the decisions will have already been made. Maybe we'll be strong enough to reverse them, but we've lost too many battles before to bet on that. In some cases, it's true, those buildings should be knocked down; no one should have to live in prison-like project buildings, or in homes with walls so moldy they make you cough within minutes. The question is, what will be built in their place?

LOCATION, LOCATION

But it's not just about when; it's also about *where*. We have to fight on our terms, but on their turf.

In 1962, the Congress of Racial Equality helped organize what was called Operation Clean Sweep. The rapidly growing population of the Brooklyn neighborhood of Bedford-Stuyvesant, overwhelmingly working people of color, was experiencing extreme levels of garbage because of reduced collection by the city government. Opera-



DONDJI

WHAT'S YOUR SANDY STORY?

Sandy Storyline is a participatory documentary about hurricane Sandy and the efforts to recover and rebuild our neighborhoods.

"If I learned one thing from the storm, it was that the memories ...are the things that deserve your focus, deserve your time... because everything else can be replaced but those can't," said Derek Prince in Coney Island, one of the hundreds of residents who have thus far told their stories through the project.

According to co-producer Rachel Falcone, "We are sharing the many underreported narratives of Hurricane Sandy and its aftermath through the experiences of community members and recovery volunteers. We hope to support you in telling the real story of what's happening in your community, while also communicating your vision for the future."

Using any phone or mobile device you can contribute a story; send a picture or text message from your phone to storyline@vojo.co or call (888) 803-9856 to record your story.

To see and hear stories and learn how to participate, visit sandystoryline.com.

—Laura Gottesdiener

tion Clean Sweep was a community-wide effort to take the struggle from Bed-Stuy to the powers that be. In one of their more provocative actions — and read closely, because this might be a good one to replicate — community members loaded trucks with all the garbage that had been skipped over by the garbage collection trucks and dumped it on the steps of Brooklyn's Borough Hall.

There are other relevant examples of taking the fight to our opponents: Occupy Wall Street itself is a good one, since it was a movement for economic justice that planted its feet firmly at the scene of the crime: right on Wall Street, where powerful decision-makers lurk in their high-rise offices. Consider also the demonstration held by Red Hook residents on Nov. 27 at the headquarters of the New York City Housing Authority, kicking off a campaign with both short- and long-term demands.

From attending meetings of outraged storm victims, I think we could soon see the rotting walls of the bungalows in the Rockaways dumped in protest on the steps of City Hall and those who still need heat might find it by sitting in at the city government buildings that always seem to be a bit

too warm on the inside but too cold when facing us. And people who need emergency housing might find it in the vacant properties the city has left languishing. And I know for sure, because it was said by angry moms and locals-turned-community-organizers, that soon enough the thousands who want their power back will decide to take it from the places that always seem to have too much of it; the Goldman Sachs headquarters that ran on generators through the night of the storm while half of New York was dark might be a good place to start.

When Hurricane Sandy hit, Occupy turned its swords into plowshares; it put on work gloves, joined communities in crisis to help meet immediate needs, and began to lay the groundwork for a genuine recovery. But let's not forget that the bulldozers are still on their way. We're going to have to learn to multi-task — plowshares, yes, and swords too.

Yotam Marom is active in Occupy Sandy, and his writing can be found at ForLouderDays.net. A longer version of this article was originally published on Wagingnonviolence.org.

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Congo's Agony

U.S.-BACKED PROXY ARMIES DRIVE RESOURCE WARS IN THE HEART OF AFRICA

BY GARY K. BUSCH

The African territory that includes Uganda, Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) has been in a virtual state of war since 1995. The wars in eastern Congo have caused the deaths of millions of Congolese, who have paid the price for living in a very rich and unmanaged country with failing or nonexistent civil institutions. These wars, centered mainly in eastern Congo (North and South Kivu and Maniema) have involved nine African nations and directly affected the lives of 50 million Congolese.

Between August 1998 and April 2004, some 3.8 million people died violent deaths in the DRC. Since 2004 this number has almost tripled. Many of these deaths were due to starvation or disease resulting from the war as well as from summary executions and capture by irregular marauding bands. Millions more were internally displaced or sought asylum in neighboring countries. Rape was endemic; insecurity was the rule and impunity the response.

Initially, these wars and the rapes, murders and pillaging associated with them derived from the efforts of Uganda and Rwanda to profit from the valuable mineral resources of eastern Congo. However, no matter how valuable the pillage of coltan, diamonds and other mineral ores might be (these industries are huge and involve thousands of conscripted artisanal miners), their value cannot compare to the potential for oil and gas wealth.

OIL AND GAS DISCOVERIES

In 2009, Heritage Oil discovered oil in Uganda. The oil and gas industries in East and Central Africa have been the world's most important area of exploration in the last nine years. Africa has the world's most frequent and substantial new findings of oil and gas. A joint report by the African Development Bank, the African Union and the African Development Fund observed oil reserves in Africa grew by more than 25 percent and gas by more than 100 percent since the late 1980s.

In May 2012, Kenya announced its second profitable oil discovery in two months, a large oil deposit in the remote northern Turkana region. Kenya has become the latest country to join the great African oil boom, following recent discoveries in Uganda and the DRC. The East African Community now forming can count on a better energy future with the Kenyan discovery, in addition to the substantial reserves in Uganda and the gas discovered in Tanzania.

South Sudan, with its large oil reserves, has applied for membership in the East African Community. There are also large oil and gas fields in Somalia.

Unfortunately, the good fortune that smiled on Eastern and Central Africa has only brought war and destruction in its wake. The Uganda finds in the Albert Graven were located in the seabed of Lake Albert. The border between Uganda and the DRC runs down the middle of the lake.

DRC and Rwanda met with the assembled lake experts and developers at Gisenyi on the northern shore of Lake Kivu to commence an initiative to define the rules and regulations of safe and environmentally sound exploitation of Lake Kivu's gas reserves. Without strict adherence to these rules, the whole lake could explode. These regulations were necessary to define the safest means of degassing the lake, but also to share that definition and the resources

pelled the artisanal miners of the Kivus to work for their marauding bands, producing coltan and diamonds. This exploitation of the DRC and its human and mineral wealth continued even when peace agreements like the Lusaka Accords, which supposedly ended the war, were signed.

Instead of warring armies, eastern Congo became controlled by warlords and militias whose exploitation took the form of pillage, rape and murder. Most of these groups have affinities with either the Rwandan or Ugandan governments, which handle the physical trade in the wealth that is exported. The Rwandans have been backing "rebel" military warlords like Laurent Nkunda or Bosco Ntanganda. These provide a fig leaf for Rwanda's continuing rape of the Congo. Others do the same for Uganda. They operate with impunity. The people most responsible for the continuing atrocities are protected.

Theoretically, the United Nations has had teams of peacekeepers in the DRC as the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO). Its track record is not impressive. Two of the built-in reasons for their lack of success were (1) relying at the beginning on the French military, which encamped at Ituri and refused to leave the city because the rebels killed two French officers on the first outing; and (2) relying on Rwandan troops

to coordinate the fight against the rebels they are covertly supporting in the name of MONUSCO. This scheme offers limited hope for the Congolese. In fact, many peacekeepers of the MONUSCO were engaged in rape, murder and pillaging. Some have been prosecuted and sent home. Their presence in the DRC adds to the fears of the population, as their actions are often indistinguishable from those of the marauding bands they are supposed to control.

The world seems to be in a state of paralysis in dealing with the daily violation of almost every human right the world community pretends it believes in. It was pushed to the back of the U.N. and African Union's agendas for years. It has only resurfaced because the M23 rebels have announced that they are going to take over the entire DRC; that is, to restart the 1998 war. That is a different question.

THE ROLE OF THE UNITED STATES

The reason this catalogue of horrors has continued unabated for the last six years is that the governments of Uganda and Rwanda are covered by the aegis of U.S. military initiatives in East and Central Africa. They provide, at great expense to the U.S. tax-



TRAINED TO KILL: Child soldiers have played an important role in the long-running war in the Democratic Republic of Congo, which has claimed millions of lives.

Uganda wants all the oil and has been funding the various insurgencies to control it; skirmishes have taken place between the two national armies and the border is heavily patrolled.

Extensive oil and gas reserves have also been found beneath Lake Tanganyika, which shares a border with the DRC, Tanzania, Zambia, and Burundi. Tanzania has largely avoided any role in the conflict and has collaborated with the DRC in extracting oil and gas. Nonetheless it has a stake in the conflict.

Perhaps the most contentious and conflicted result of oil and gas finds in the region has been Vanoil of Canada's success in finding oil beneath Lake Kivu on the Rwanda-DRC border. Lake Kivu is a unique gas-bearing lake in the western leg of the African Rift Valleys, making it a small but very interesting component of the Great Lakes of Africa. Vanoil holds exclusive exploration rights to the 627-square-mile oil and gas concession in the East Kivu Graben, which straddles Rwanda and the DRC and is the southern extension of the Albertine Graben in Uganda where major oil discoveries have been made by Tullow Oil and Heritage Oil.

In March 2007, the governments of the

equitably between the countries involved. The Management Prescriptions for the development of Lake Kivu now form the basis of regulations on the lake and the guide by which the bilateral authority being formed will control the development of the lake's resources. Rwanda seeks to alter this by taking control of the other side of the lake. It has recently taken over Goma through its surrogates in the M23 movement and plans to exploit the oil reserves with Vanoil and to seek a competent gas partner for the buried methane.

IMPUNITY RULES

Why do Rwanda and Uganda, whose armies invaded the DRC in 1998 to remove Laurent Kabila from power and were soundly defeated in battle by the DRC, the Zimbabweans, Angolans and Namibians, now feel that they can renew their struggle to conquer the mineral wealth of the DRC with such impunity? After a brief lapse they began to support surrogate armies in the DRC with weapons, training and communications. This was particularly true of the Banyamulenge (the Tutsi who lived in eastern Congo and were part of Kagame's Tutsi diaspora). They continued to rape and pillage and com-

payer and at a high level of reward to the Museveni and Kagame clans, the troops for the U.S. surrogate army. Their soldiers fight for the United States in Somalia, Afghanistan and elsewhere in the Horn of Africa. The United States gives them arms, equipment, training, air support, cash and immunity for their gross violations of human rights of their neighbors. The U.S. AFRICOM command relies on Uganda and Rwanda to carry out its missions in East and Central Africa. The U.N. ambassador, Susan Rice, who became the United States' main supporter of the anti-Kabila alliance when she was assistant secretary of state for Africa, now defends the two with a passion at the U.N.

The United States has been at war in Africa since the 1950s — in Angola, the DRC, Somalia, the Sudan, Ethiopia, Somalia, Morocco, Libya and Djibouti, to name but a few countries. In most cases the United States has financed, armed and supervised indigenous forces. In its support of the anti-MPLA forces in Angola, it sent arms and equipment to the UNITA opposition. In the DRC, Larry Devlin of the CIA was an unofficial minister of Mobutu's government; the United States ran its own air force in the Congo. U.S. airmen supported the South African forces in Kwando, Fort Doppies and Encana bases in the Caprivi region of Namibia. At these bases one could also find soldiers from southern Rhodesia and German, French, Portuguese and other NATO troops.

One of the largest of these bases was at Wheelus Field, just east of Tripoli, Libya. During the Korean War, Wheelus was used by the U.S. Strategic Air Command (SAC), later becoming a primary training ground for NATO forces. Wheelus became a vital link in SAC war plans for use as a bomber, tanker refuelling and recon-fighter base. The United States left in 1970. Another giant base was Kagnev Field in Asmara, Eritrea, home to the U.S. Army's 4th Detachment of the Second Signal Service Battalion. Kagnev Station became home for more than 5,000 U.S. citizens during the 1960s. Kagnev Station operated until April 29, 1977.

Today the U.S. battle in North Africa is with Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), which combines drug and diamond smuggling with terrorist acts. This battle has required a lot of troops on the ground as advisers and trainers, as well as teams of DEA agents across West Africa. The United States is preparing to sustain and support the soldiers who will seek to remove the Muslim fundamentalist extremists in Mali.

According to a U.S. Congressional Research Service Study published in November 2010, Washington has dispatched anywhere between hundreds and several thousand combat troops and dozens of fighter planes and warships to buttress client dictatorships or to unseat adversarial regimes in dozens of countries, almost on a yearly basis. The record shows that U.S. armed forces intervened in Africa 47 times prior to the current endeavor.

Between the mid-1950s and the end of the 1970s, only four overt military operations

were recorded, though large-scale proxy and clandestine military operations were pervasive. Under Reagan and the first Bush (1980–91), military intervention accelerated to eight overt operations, not counting the large-scale clandestine “special forces” and proxy wars in southern Africa. Under the Clinton regime, militarized intervention in Africa took off. Between 1992 and 2000, the United States conducted 17 armed incursions, including a large-scale invasion of Somalia and military backing for the Rwandan regime.

Clinton intervened in Liberia, Gabon, Congo and Sierra Leone to prop up troubled regimes. He bombed the Sudan and dispatched military personnel to Kenya and Ethiopia to back proxy clients assaulting Somalia. Under George W. Bush, 15 military interventions took place, mainly in Central and East Africa.

Most of the U.S. African outreach is disproportionately built on military links to client military chiefs. The Pentagon has military ties with 53 African countries (including Libya prior to the current attack). Washington's efforts to militarize Africa and turn its armies into proxy mercenaries protecting property and fighting terrorists were accelerated after 9/11. The Bush administration announced in 2002 that Africa was a “strategic priority in fighting terrorism.” Henceforth, U.S. foreign policy

strategists, with the backing of both liberal and neoconservative members of Congress, moved to centralize and coordinate a military policy on a continent-wide basis, forming the African Command (AFRICOM). The latter organizes African armies, euphemistically called “cooperative partnerships,” to conduct neocolonial wars based on bilateral agreements as well as “multilateral” links with the Organization of African Unity.

A typical building block is the annual Operation Flintlock exercises, in which U.S., African and European military forces combine to engage in a series of multinational military exercises designed to foster and develop international security cooperation in North and West Africa. The latest exercises were part of the Trans-Sahara Counter-Terrorism Partnership (TSCTP) and included 600 U.S. Marines and Special Forces, units from France and Britain and smaller European contingents from Germany, Spain and the Netherlands. African countries with military representation included Mali, Algeria, Burkina Faso, Niger, Mauritania,

Continued on page 16

The Rockaways

Continued from page 11

sees investment — the creation of exclusive condos not included — a newly formed

participatory budgeting council, comprised of community leaders and organizers who have been doing recovery work since the storm hit, is slated to make decisions about how outside funding is allocated. The city has yet to commit to funneling any of the billions of dollars in federal reconstruction funds it expects to receive. But some of Occupy Sandy’s \$612,000 in donated funds that have been put aside will be turned over to the participatory budgeting council to direct the funding of long-term projects.

As Luis Casco said at a recent neighborhood meeting at St. Gertrude’s church on 38th Street, “This is about breakfast programs, day care centers, after school activities. ... This is going to take two to three years, but it will make the Rockaways better.”

For other young leaders in Far Rockaway, the recovery isn’t just measured in concrete numbers of new health clinics or funding for social programs. The work is also about changing the perception of the neighborhood and of what the residents themselves are able to accomplish.

At the same meeting at St. Gertrude’s, one woman explained, “Everyone looks at Far Rockaway like it’s the ghetto or the slums. ...This also has to be about telling our own people, ‘Step up out of that house so we can fix the situation at hand.’”

ACROSS THE CITY

On Dec. 6, the city launched its first offensive. The community-led response to Hurricane Sandy had spread across the city: In Red Hook, public housing residents were hosting community meetings and marches to demand fairer treatment by the New York City Housing Authority. In Staten Island, immigrant workers from El Centro, a day laborer center, were volunteering their construction expertise, gutting neighbors’ houses and constructing dry wall for free. And across the city, long-established advocacy groups, such as the Good Old Lower East Side in Manhattan, which distributed food, supplies and medical assistance for nine days after the storm, were planning to come together to consider how climate justice — a global movement to stop climate change and its lethal effects — can be a greater focus of their organizing work.

It was time, in short, for the city to take some power back. At a downtown press

conference, Mayor Michael Bloomberg announced that Marc Ricks, a vice president in the infrastructure investment team at Goldman Sachs, would be the head of the city’s long-term Sandy recovery effort. Bloomberg also doubled-down on his luxury redevelopment plan for the city’s waterfront. The industry lobbyists’ behind-the-scenes proposals — which, as Naomi Klein has written, include everything from rebuilding roads and tunnels as public-private partnerships to suspending labor laws and corporate regulations in the hardest-hit areas — floated in the air as the stored-away weapons in the Mayor’s arsenal.

But community organizers have a long-term trick of their own: uniting the Sandy reconstruction effort to the campaigns to stop austerity and fiscal cliff cuts to social services — a relationship that humanizes the financial policy battle in a way that few could have expected.

Jeremy Saunders, a lead organizer at Voices of Community Activists & Leaders (VOCAL-NY) explained that austerity measures weaken the infrastructure, both physical and social, in the city’s poorest communities, which will make these neighborhoods less prepared to respond to and recover from the future climate-related crises that scientists predict will be ever more frequent, particularly in low-lying areas where public and low-income housing is located.

“The economic system we have now is the post-Katrina New Orleans model where there’s displacement, gentrification and privatization [after a storm]. We’re making the alternative model. We’re asking: ow can we make a disaster into an opportunity to make New York City sustainable?” he said.

The long-term goal, he explained, is to combine the struggle for economic justice and climate justice — all the while the effects of inaction are on display only a few subways stops away from the city’s power brokers.

And the biggest challenge, in his mind, isn’t a Goldman Sachs VP heading the city’s recovery; it’s the community’s own mental limitations.

“I think our biggest problem around Sandy right now is that, as a community, we can’t even conceptualize how big an opportunity — and how big a threat — this really is.”

THE ROCKAWAY COUGH

Right now, the Rockaways has a dry hacking type of cough that one resident described on television as a “slight choking.” Public health officials say it’s likely a result of mold and airborne pollutants. To them, the solu-

ing. “ Hamas has provided a model, albeit a painful one, of how you get Israel to the table. Abu Mazen [the nickname for Abbas] who offers everything, meets with no one,” wrote Mark Perry, a historian and former advisor to Yasir Arafat who has had extensive contacts with Hamas, in an email. “Ironically, the biggest loss Israel suffered is they proved to the world that the only time they’ll talk to a Palestinian group is when they feel pain.”

Israel’s assault on Gaza has ended, and the status quo is back. Israel remains a powerful state, but its position in the region is changing. Dealing with a changed Middle East and a reinvigorated Hamas is no victory for Israel.

A version of this article was originally published on Alternet.org.

Congo

Continued from page 15

Nigeria, Chad, Senegal, Tunisia and Morocco.

MUSEVENI AND KAGAME

In Central Africa one of the key actors in the relations between Uganda and the rest of the world and a good indicator of the role of President Yoweri Museveni is his brother, General Salim Saleh. Salim Saleh is a money launderer, drug dealer, resource thief, plunderer and advisor to the President of Uganda on military matters. Formerly, he was the Ugandan minister of state for microfinance. Before that, he was a high-ranking military official. He has been implicated by the U.N. Security Council for plundering natural resources in the DRC.

The U.S. government was fully aware of Museveni’s participation in these crimes, just as it was aware of the barbaric practices of its favorite African despot, Paul Kagame of Rwanda, whose proxy armies have killed thousands of civilians in the DRC. However, their armies are needed by AFRICOM, and so it is unlikely that these two will face major problems unless they actually do try to take over the DRC.

THE DRC’S WEAKNESSES

The root of many of the DRC’s difficulties lies with the fact that its current leader, President Joseph Kabila, is weak, vacillating and bereft of the support of a united nation. Unlike his father, President Laurent-Désiré

Kabila, who commanded the loyalty of much of the DRC, Joseph is seen as aloof, manipulative and without a set of core beliefs. That weakness has alienated many in the national army. The army needs discipline, a purpose and the materials to engage with its enemies. The Kabila government has not been able to supply these, so the country is vulnerable. The citizens of the DRC have suffered grievously for many years, following a brief period of hope after independence. Their future looks no better.

The countries that supported the DRC in its last war against the Ugandan and Rwandan invaders may well intervene again. This would be a disaster for regional African politics. If the United States can bring itself to actually do something positive to restrain its military surrogates in Uganda and Rwanda and indicate that they are not immune to prosecution for crimes against humanity, then perhaps there is a chance to establish peace in eastern DRC. Without a stern contingency being imposed by the United States in the region, the lure of a fast buck to be made in the oil and gas businesses will circumvent any humanitarian impulse by Museveni and Kagame. Washington’s current policy of wringing its hands and saying nothing is a disgrace to the values it constantly professes for the continent.

Gary K. Busch is the editor and publisher of the web-based news journal of international relations ocnus.net

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tion includes face masks and bleach. But for local leaders, the “Rockaway cough,” as it is called, is the vocalization of the storm’s immediate impact, but the underlying issues tie together budget cuts, environmental justice and future disasters, demonstrating the way that an “alternative model” for recovery should work on multiple fronts.

The lack of access to mental and physical health care began before Sandy, when the New York State Health Department shuttered Peninsula Hospital, located at Beach 50th Street and Rockaway Beach Boulevard, leaving only one remaining hospital on the island. Meanwhile, residents also express concern about the long-term health impact of waste or pollution-generating sites in the neighborhood, such as the MTA bus depot at 47th Street and Rockaway Beach Boulevard and the now-inactive garbage dump site in the 30s where, after it closed, the children used to play football because there was no neighborhood field. (A new field recently opened.) Across New York City, pollution sites are disproportionately concentrated in low-income communities of color, exposing these residents to more of the toxins related to the city’s massive energy use, despite the fact that African Americans, on average nationally, emit 20 percent less carbon per person than white Americans.

And then, of course, there’s the greatest public health crisis of all: future climate-related disasters that may eventually submerge the Rockaways for good. New Yorkers overwhelmingly think that human-created energy emissions contributed to the severity of Hurricane Sandy. A poll by Siena College found that 69 percent of those surveyed thought the storm was related to global climate change.

Given the growing acceptance of this phenomenon, the question of how much to

rebuild on low-lying areas like the Rockaways is contested. Scientists predict that within this century the seas will rise at least 2.6 feet, an increase that will submerge about half of the Rockaways peninsula underwater.

SURPRISINGLY PROMISING

Yet, from the front porches of the surviving bungalows, at least the short-term future of the peninsula looks surprisingly promising. On Beach 24th Street in Far Rockaway, Pat Carter is making concrete plans: each block will have a captain and a co-captain tasked with knowing every family’s needs; those block captains will share that information with the rest of the neighborhood, creating a horizontal network to respond to long-term challenges in the same way that the immediate relief effort was organized.

“I hope everyone can see what everyone else’s needs are and then help each other with them,” she said. She explained that this type of neighborhood organization would never have been possible pre-Sandy.

“And then this summer we’ll have a beach party,” she said, standing across the street from her bungalow. Behind her, less than a block away, was the Atlantic Ocean, which had surged up her street on the night of the storm, rising about two feet up the concrete wall in front her house and flowing, she said, from all four directions.

Continuing her thoughts she said, “We’ve got one of the nicest beaches in New York City. So we’re not going to have just a block party. We’re going to have a beach party.”

Laura Gottesdiener is an organizer with Occupy Wall Street and is the author of A Dream Foreclosed: The Fight for a Place to Call Home, forthcoming from Zuccotti Park Press.

Gaza

Continued from page 8

whose regime depends on U.S. and European financial support and has suppressed Hamas’ activities in the West Bank, went to the United Nations in November to push for Palestine to be accepted as a “non-member” state. Abbas was successful in his bid, and Hamas backed his efforts as part of a new-found push to reconcile the rival Palestinian factions.

But the success of the U.N. bid will likely not change anything on the ground, similar to how last year’s U.N. bid failed because the United States blocked the effort. And once that becomes more apparent on the ground in the West Bank, Hamas’ model of armed resistance will look more enticing.

How Occupy Wall Street Got Religion

TIES TO FRIENDLY CHURCHES SPUR MOVEMENT'S REBIRTH

BY NATHAN SCHNEIDER

A year ago around this time, Occupy Wall Street was celebrating Advent — the season when Christians anticipate the birth of Jesus at Christmas. In front of Trinity Church, right at the top of Wall Street along Broadway, Occupiers set up a little model tent with the statuettes of a nativity scene inside: Mary, Joseph and the Christ child in a manger, surrounded by animals. In the back, an angel held a tiny cardboard sign with a verse from Luke's Gospel: "There was no room for them in the inn." The reason for these activists' interest in the liturgical calendar, of course, was the movement's ongoing effort to convince Trinity to start acting less like a real estate corporation and more like a church, and to let the movement use a vacant property that Trinity owns.

A year later, even as a resilient few continue their 24-hour vigil on the sidewalk outside Trinity, churches and Occupiers are having a very different kind of Advent season together. Finding room in churches is no longer a problem for the movement.

The day after Hurricane Sandy struck New York in late October, Occupiers hustled to organize a massive popular relief effort, and Occupy Sandy came into being. By circumstance and necessity, it has mostly taken place in churches; they are the large public spaces available in affected areas, and they were the people willing to open their doors. Two churches on high ground in Brooklyn became organizing hubs, and others in the Rockaways, Coney Island, Staten Island and Red Hook became depots for getting supplies and support to devastated neighborhoods. To make this possible, Occupiers have had to win the locals' trust — by helping clean up the damaged churches and by showing their determination to help those whom the state-sponsored relief effort was leaving behind. When the time for worship services came around, they'd cleared the supplies off the pews.

"Occupy Sandy has been miraculous for us, really," said Bob Dennis, parish manager at St. Margaret Mary, a Catholic church in Staten Island. "They are doing exactly what Christ preached." Before this, the police and firemen living in his neighborhood hadn't had much good to say about Occupy Wall Street, but that has changed completely.

Religious leaders are organizing tours to show off the Occupy Sandy relief efforts of which they've been a part, and they're speaking out against the failures of city, state and federal government. Congregations are getting to know Occupiers one on one by working together in a relief effort that every day — as the profiteering developers draw nearer — is growing into an act of resistance.

And that's only one part of it. Months before Sandy, organizers with the Occupy Wall Street group Strike Debt made a concerted effort to reach out to religious allies for help on a new project they were calling the Rolling Jubilee; by buying up defaulted loans for

pennies on the dollar, and then abolishing them, organizers hoped to spread the spirit of jubilee — an ancient biblical practice of debt forgiveness.

The religious groups jumped at the chance to help. Occupy Faith organized an event in New York to celebrate the Rolling Jubilee's

yet. Occupy Wall Street has learned from the Egyptian Revolution before, and now, even if by accident, it is doing so again.

While Tahrir Square was still full of tents and tanks, and Hosni Mubarak was still in power, the editors of *Adbusters* magazine were already imagining a "Million Man



LYNNE FOSTER

launch. Occupy Catholics (of which I am a part) took the opportunity to reclaim the Catholic concepts of jubilee and usury for the present economic crisis and released a statement in support of the Rolling Jubilee that has been signed by Catholics across the country.

The Rolling Jubilee idea has been hugely successful, raising more money more quickly than anyone anticipated — around \$10 million in debt is poised to be abolished. But now Strike Debt, too, has turned its attention to working with those affected by the hurricane. On Dec. 2, the group published "Shouldering the Costs," a report on the proliferation of debt in the aftermath of Sandy. The document was released with an event at — where else? — a church in Staten Island.

This newfound access to religious real estate is not merely a convenience for this movement; it has implications that a lot of people probably aren't even thinking about

March on Wall Street," the idea that led to what would become their July 13, 2011, call to #occupywallstreet. More than a year after the occupation at Zuccotti Park began, though, and nearly two years after crowds first filled Tahrir, neither revolt very much resembles its origins. The Egyptian Revolution, first provoked by tech-savvy young activists, has now been hijacked as a coup for the Muslim Brotherhood, a conservative religious party; its only viable challenger is none other than Mubarak's *ancien regime*, minus only Mubarak himself. Occupy, meanwhile, has lost its encampments and, despite whatever evidence there is to the contrary, most of its enemies in power deem it no longer a threat.

Among many U.S. activists even today, the dream of creating a Tahrir-sized rupture in this country persists — of finally drawing enough people into the streets and causing enough trouble to make Wall Street cower. But what if something on the scale of Tahrir

really were to happen in the United States? What would be the outcome?

I was thinking of this question recently while on an unrelated reporting mission at a massive evangelical Christian megachurch near the Rocky Mountains. Several thousand (mostly white, upper-middle-class) people were there that day, of all ages. They had come back after Sunday morning services for an afternoon series of talks on philosophy — far more people than attend your average Occupy action.

Every time I step foot in one of these places, it strikes me how they put radicals in the United States to shame. These churches organize real, life-giving mutual aid as the basis of an independent political discourse and power base. Church membership is far larger, for instance, than that of unions in this country.

If there were a sudden, Tahrir-like popular uprising right now, with riots in all the cities and so forth, I can't help but think that it would be organizations like the church I went to that would come out taking power in the end, even more so than they already do — just as the Islamists have in Egypt.

If the idea of occupying symbolic public space was the Egyptians' first lesson for Occupy Wall Street, this is the second: Win religion over before it beats you out.

Through religion, again and again, people in the United States have organized for power. Religion is also the means by which many imagine and work for a world more just than this one. Just about every successful popular movement in U.S. history has had to recognize this, from the American Revolution to labor, and from civil rights to today's campaigners for marriage equality — and now Occupy.

When I stop by the Occupy Sandy hub near my house — the Episcopal church of St. Luke and St. Matthew — and join the mayhem of volunteers carrying boxes this way and that, and poke my head into the upper room full of laptops and organizers around a long table, and see Occupiers in line for communion at Sunday services, I keep thinking of how Alcoholics Anonymous' 12-step program ends. The 12th step is where you cap off all the self-involved inner work you've been doing, and get over yourself for a bit, and heal yourself by helping someone else.

Anyone who has been around Occupy Wall Street during the year since its eviction from Zuccotti Park knows it has been in need of healing. Whether through flood-soaked churches, or on the debt market, this is how Occupy movement has always been at its best, and its most exciting, and its most necessary: When it shows people how to build their own power, and to strengthen their own communities, this movement finds itself.

Nathan Schneider is an editor at *Waging-nonviolence.org* and is the author of *God in Proof: The Story of a Search from the Ancients to the Internet* (Spring 2013, University of California Press). Visit his website at *TheRowBoat.com*.

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the Air — Max Elbaum

MON JAN 7, 7PM • Free
READING: LGBTQ SCIENCE FICTION & FANTASY NIGHT.
Speculative fiction is a fundamentally queer enterprise - an exercise in imagining radically different ways of being.

THU JAN 10, 7PM • Free
READING: *QUEER ACTIVISM IN INDIA: A STORY IN THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF ETHICS*.
In *Queer Activism in India*, Naisargi N. Dave examines the formation of lesbian communities in India from the 1980s to the early 2000s. Dave studies the everyday practices that constitute queer activism in India

SAT JAN 12, 7PM • Free
TALK: MICKEY Z.: OCCUPY THE CLIMATE (OUR POST-SANDY CHOICES)
The impact and aftermath of Hurricane Sandy has presented us with the most powerful teaching moment since 9/11. Greenhouse gases contribute to climate change and thus, the impact of Sandy - and the number one cause of human-created greenhouse gases is the global animal by-products industry. Clearly, our choices are all connected and must remain connected within any movement aiming for holistic justice.

HISTORY D STATES

REVIEW

The Soul is a Metaphor

Cloud Atlas
DIRECTED BY TOM TYKWER, ANDY WACHOWSKI AND LANA WACHOWSKI
WARNER BROTHERS, 2012

The audience claps in thunderous waves as she walks on stage and bows, her pink dreads like a flower on her head. A few years ago, Lana Wachowski was Larry Wachowski, a man who co-wrote and co-directed the *Matrix* movies. Millions of people watched the films, seeing in them a dream of revolution. None of them knew that inside the male body of the *Matrix* director and writer, lived a woman considering suicide.

“I began to believe the voices in my head that I was a freak, that I am broken...that I will never be lovable.” Wachowski told them of her teenage identity crisis, “... I know the train platform will be empty at night because it always is...I try not to think of anything but jumping as the train comes...Suddenly I notice someone walking down the ramp. It is a skinny older, old man wearing large, 1970s square-style glasses that remind [me] of the ones my grandma wears. He stares at me the way animals stare at each other. I don’t know why he wouldn’t look away. All I know is that because he didn’t, I am still here.”

Being loved for one’s true self — it is the pivot in her speech for the Human Rights Campaign’s Visibility Award. When she ends, they clap loudly because the HRC audience — gays, lesbians, transgender and bi-sexual people — like her, struggled for visibility. A great wave of gratitude could be heard in their voices. They knew that anyone who cheered for Neo in the *Matrix* or Somni 451 in *Cloud Atlas* would now realize they also indirectly cheered the transformation of Larry Wachowski into Lana.

The need to be free — it drives the plots of Wachowski movies — can now in part be seen to come from the desire to transform one’s body to fit a deep self-image. It crosses the last red line of conservatism, the belief that sex and gender identity are naturally locked. And whoever crosses that line is in danger. In 1999, a year after a transgender woman was stabbed 20 times,



Cloud Atlas directors Tom Tykwer, Lana Wachowski and Andy Wachowski.

advocates began the Transgender Day of Remembrance to honor those killed in hate crimes. The roll call for those murdered in the United States is up to 327 and another 300 reported in other countries. Add to that the harassment, bullying and isolation flowing down on them like a cascade of psychological acid.

In this light, *Cloud Atlas*’ motif of the transmigration of souls through time can be read as an allegory for Lana Wachowski’s migration from a male to female body. In the film, adapted from the book of the same name, six separate stories are fused into one overarching plot. It leaps from a lawyer discovering the horror of slavery on a 19th century sea voyage, a gay male couple separated by suicide in the 1930s, a black female journalist discovering the corruption at a nuclear power plant in the 1970s, an elderly publisher escaping a prison-like retirement home, a clone slave who joins a revolutionary group in the 22nd century and finally to the far future where a tech advanced visitor to a left-behind tribe is guided to a mountaintop satellite where she zaps an SOS message to humans living on other

planets.

At the *Cloud Atlas* press conference, Lana Wachowski said, “We all felt the book affects your brain. You read it and your brain no longer splits it up into six stories. Your brain begins making connections itself.” The directors line up the climaxes of the many stories like mountaintops in a row so that the viewer can see the same struggle for freedom over the great expanse of time. And in each era, authority figures — whether slave traders or futuristic city cops — say “There is a natural order to the world.”

And in each climax there is a hero, male or female, who knows this to be a lie. The effect on the audience in seeing such vastly different societies from the 19th century’s racial slavery to the genetic clone slavery of the 22nd century is the realization that no natural order exists. Every society is a web of power and ideology woven together that ensnares the bodies of those living in them. What is natural is the desire to embody the repressed truth and live it. The lawyer saves and in turn is saved by an escaped African slave on the ship; the gay couple frolic in bed as the hotel staff bang on

the door; a journalist uncovers corporate corruption; the clone slave woman Somni 451 falls in love with the revolutionary who rescued her, even though it is forbidden by law.

And in each new story, each new scene, we see the familiar faces of the actors under new make-up, playing different lives but interconnected by the unforeseen consequences of their actions. We see the New Age fable of the transmigration of souls but learn to accept Tom Hanks, Halle Berry, James Darcy, Susan Sarandon, Keith David and Hugh Grant in different bodies. They change skin color, change sex, change personality, change morally but we see the essential quality that unites their different bodies.

And if we could see through the movie, past the author’s story lines, past the special effects and into the mind of the directors we’d see Andy Wachowski, a man who loved his brother Larry as he became a woman. If we looked further, we’d see Lana Wachowski as a woman emerging like a butterfly from the cocoon of an old body.

— NICHOLAS POWERS

To Be Young, Targeted and Black

“Black + Male: Post Obama”
SIYAKA TAYLOR-LEWIS
BRECHT FORUM
451 WEST ST.
THROUGH JANUARY 30

When Trayvon Martin was murdered last February, the story struck a deep, nation-wide chord, partly because of how immediately relatable Martin’s situation was. He was yet another young, Black man whose life was cut short, with the police (initially) treating it all as a simple matter of course — as if it were Martin’s fault for having existed at all. Trayvon’s case makes its presence felt in “Black + Male: Post Obama,” a photo/audio project by Siyaka Taylor-Lewis at the Brecht Forum. In one photo, we see a hooded figure rising through a blurred, anonymous city street, and Taylor-Lewis tells us through accompanying text that he sometimes fears for his safety while walking at night. As a young, Black man, he fits “the description” you see. Is the photo a self-portrait? We don’t know; Taylor-Lewis’ point is that it could be. In the show’s best image, two young Black men are caught in the harsh glare of a police car’s headlights, subjected to a routine stop-and-frisk. The photo is framed dynamically through panes and planks — it happened outside



The Fighter, Siyaka Taylor-Lewis

Taylor-Lewis’ window. Other photo subjects include professors, fathers, old friends, homeless men, protesters, artists and drug dealers. Taylor-Lewis was trained in traditional dark-room techniques, and it shows. The images here are made with rich tones and luminous contrasts (appropriately, the photos are all in black and white). At its best, his work recalls classic photojournalism and mid-century, socially-engaged art photography; it’s an approach that’s a bit at odds with the unmistakably digital-era audio, in which Taylor-Lewis puts his subjects’ statements on race and racism against languid, lounge-y beats. This is an exhibit about the Obama era, but the concerns at work here have wracked Black communities for generations: poverty, isolation, drugs, police aggression and, above all else, institutional racism. The exhibit serves as a highly personal rejoinder to those pundits who insist that Obama’s ascendancy has ob-

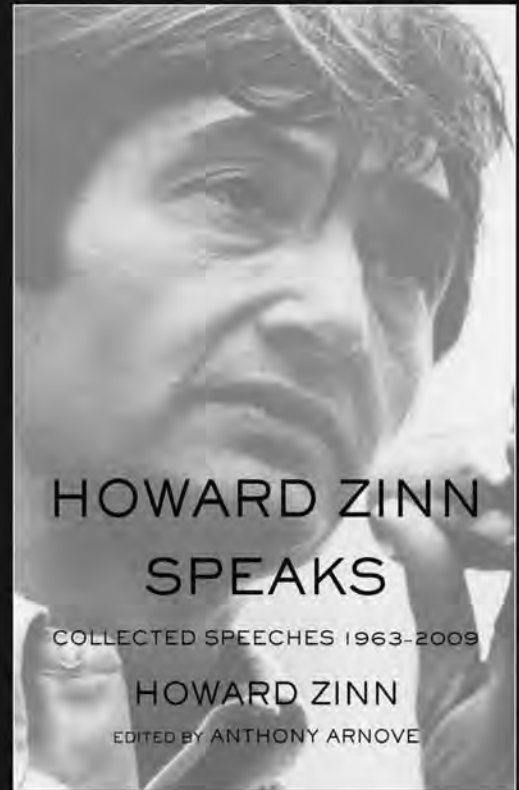
viated American racism (as if two election victories and four years in office were enough to erase centuries of violence). Not all of these photos work — some of the images veer uncomfortably close to snapshot territory. But, even in a less-considered mode, the day-in, day-out familiarity of these pictures helps underscore Taylor-Lewis’ major point: that for many Americans, actions that seem mundane — like raising children, working a job, living to an old age, going to a New Year’s party or even just walking down the street — become, at some level, an act of resistance or struggle. Or, as one of Taylor-Lewis’s subjects put it: “Being a Black man in America is like always having to watch your back, even when you’re at home.”

On Jan. 25, Brecht Forum will hold a benefit auction of Siyaka Taylor-Lewis’ photos. Taylor-Lewis was injured in a fire earlier this year.

— MIKE NEWTON

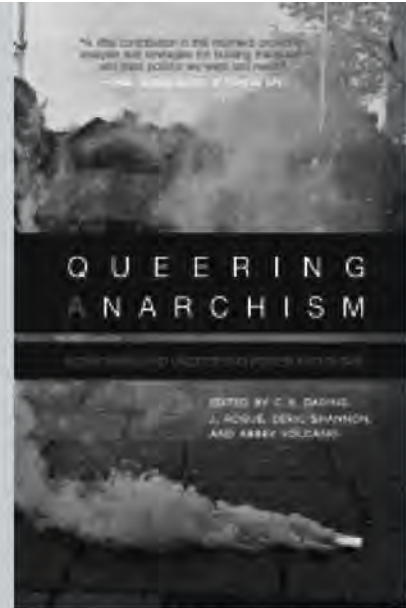


The Description, Siyaka Taylor-Lewis



“Collected here for the first time, Howard’s speeches — spanning an extraordinary life of passion and principle — come to us at the moment when we need them most: just as a global network of popular uprisings searches for what comes next. We could ask for no wiser a guide than Howard Zinn.”
—Naomi Klein, author, *The Shock Doctrine*

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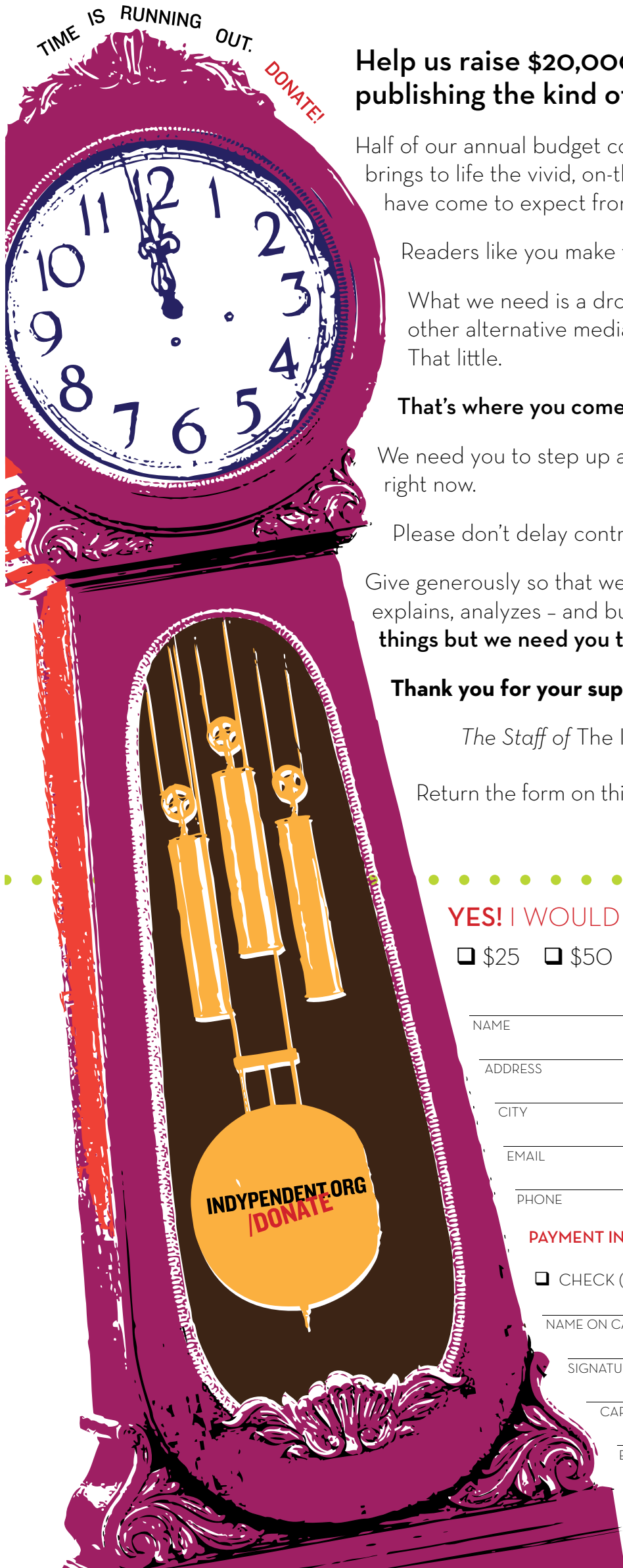


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